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Kittleman, council strike notes of harmony

'Campaign is behind us and it's time to act,' says new Howard County executive

BY AMANDA YEAGER
ayeager@tribune.com

Newly elected Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman and the five members of the Howard County Council struck a conciliatory note at their inauguration Monday night, with speeches emphasizing progress over party.

"The campaign is behind us and it's time to act, not hastily or without due diligence, but forcefully and purposefully to achieve our goals," said Kittleman, the county's first Republican executive since 1998.

Kittleman succeeds departing County Executive Ken Ulman, a Democrat who served for two terms and recently lost a bid for lieutenant governor.

Elected officials, supporters and family members filled more than three-quarters of the auditorium at Glenelg High School to watch Kittleman and the council members take their oath of office.

Kittleman said his administration's priorities would be education and public safety.

"I intend... to do everything within our power to help every student achieve, to be the top of his or her potential. It's not an easy task, but not an impossible one either," he said. Kittleman plans to work on a "24/7" education initiative that aims to support Howard County students after hours as well as during the school day.

He said he looks forward "to partnering with the business community to expand economic development," in downtown Columbia and beyond.

"The downtown Columbia plan is crucial," Kittleman said, "however, we must not forget that we have many other areas in Howard County where we can also expand economic development opportunities."

Kittleman promised to listen to opinions from across the political aisle.

"As iron sharpens iron, vigorous public debate is essential in shaping strong public policy," he said. "Such debate will be welcome in our administration."

"Our administration will be inclusive, ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table," Kittleman added.

The swearing-in ceremony, which included an introduction from Kittleman's wife, Robin Kittleman, was at times emotional. The county executive's voice broke as he thanked his family for their

support during the campaign, and again when reflecting upon his father, the late Sen. Robert Kittleman.

"He believed in equality for everyone and freedom for all, and he instilled those beliefs in me. And I will carry them with me as county executive," he said.

Members of the County Council, four of whom are returning for a third and final term, also took their oaths in the invitation-only ceremony Dec. 1, which was hosted by National Public Radio journalist Korva Coleman, a longtime resident of Columbia's Thunder Hill district.

Jon Weinstein, a Democrat and owner of consulting firm Line of Sight, is the only new face this term. He replaces Courtney Watson, a Democrat who represented Ellicott City, ElkrIDGE and Hanover in District 1 before being defeated by Kittleman in the tight race for county executive.

Weinstein said he intends to look to the community for solutions to the challenges of the next four years.

"It is incumbent upon us... to seek out and harness the talents of those who want to make a difference as well as those who stayed home" this Nov. 4, he said.

Kittleman said he looked forward to working closely with the council, which retained its Democratic supermajority this election season.

"I commit to doing everything in my power to ensure that together we make Howard County an even greater place to live," he said. "And I mean that, I really do."

After being sworn in, the council held its first legislative session, where councilmembers introduced several pieces of legislation left over from Ulman's administration.

They also elected leaders: Mary Kay Sigaty, a Democrat from west Columbia, will chair the council through December 2015, while Weinstein will serve as vice chair.

In her inaugural remarks, Sigaty focused on work in downtown Columbia, where new development has already begun and will expand over the course of

this term.

"I came to the county because of the promise of Jim Rouse," Sigaty said. "I think we stand again at a point where we need to grab our own future, imagine it and move forward, establishing a strong community that every single person here can see themselves as a part of."

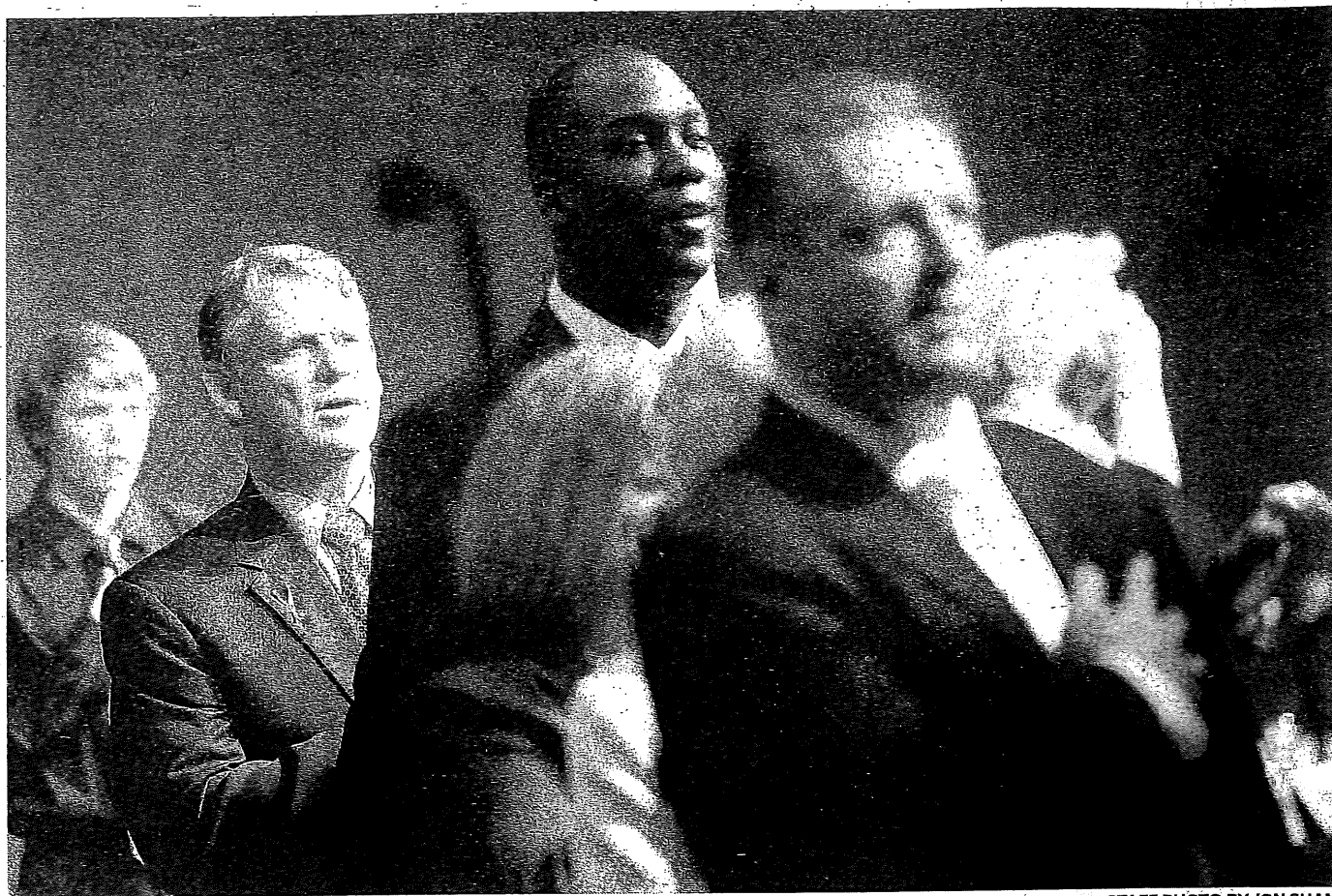
In other appointments, former council chair Calvin Ball, an east Columbia Democrat, will be chair of the zoning board and Jen Terrasa, a Democrat who represents Savage, North Laurel and parts of Columbia, will be the vice chair. Fulton Republican Greg Fox will be liquor board chair and Ball will be vice chair.

Ball echoed Kittleman's sentiment of overcoming political differences.

"Campaigns are a crucible in which heat, pressure and intensity can be felt," he said. Now, "we will work together to arise from this crucible wiser, stronger and united in a mission to write the next chapter."

"Today, the campaigns are over."

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STAFF PHOTO BY JON SHAM

County Executive-elect Allan Kittleman, second from left, recites the Pledge of Allegiance with members of the County Council at a ceremony in which he and council members took their oaths of office Dec. 1 at Glénelg High School.